A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE DHIVEHI LANGUAGE

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Photographs by: Shamoon
Portrait Gallery
Male, Maldives

Layout & Design: Julisha Ibrahim

Special thanks to the Chairman of the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research Mr Abbas Ibrahim, the Special Advisors of the Centre Ms Naseema Muhammad, Mr Muhammad Waheed, Mr Abdullah Sodiq, the director Ms Naseema Ahmed and also to the dedicated staff of the Centre.

ISBN 99915-1-032-X

Published by The National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research
Male, Republic of Maldives
October 2002

Printed in the Maldives by Novelty Printers and Publishers

FOREWARD

In recent years, more and more Maldivians have been becoming aware of the age and complexity of their own mother-language and its importance as a symbol of their cultural heritage. Dhivehi has also become a subject of interest to researchers of Indic languages.

There has been little written on the Dhivehi language in a language other than Dhivehi and so it has been difficult for those who do not speak the language to get any information about it. Therefore, this book "A General Overview of the Dhivehi Language" by Ms Yumna Maumoon, is a most welcome and valuable addition to the few existing books.

In writing this book, Ms Yumna Maumoon has made a very valuable contribution towards fulfilling a long-felt need. I thank her sincerely and offer her my congratulations, and would like to express the hope that this is only the first of many more books she will write in the coming years. I am sure that this book, "A General Overview of the Dhivehi Language", will become an important asset towards a better understanding of Dhivehi.

I also take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to his Excellency the President Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, for his support, guidance and encouragement, in our work at the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research. He has been a source of inspiration to the members of this Centre ever since its establishment in 1982, and our achievements in the ensuing years have been in no small measure, a result of his encouragement.

Abbas Ibrahim
Chairman

National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research

PREFACE

Dhivehi (or Divehi), is the language spoken by a population of two hundred and seventy thousand people living in the Republic of Maldives, an nation of islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean. It is an Indo-Aryan language closely related to Sinhalese of Sri Lanka.

Very little has been written on the Dhivehi language especially in a language other than Dhivehi. Therefore there has been little opportunity, for those who do not speak the language, to acquire any information about the Dhivehi language.

Hence my aim in writing this book is to give introduction to and an overview of the Dhivehi language, its origin and historical development to the reader who is unacquainted with the language. I have tried to look at the present status of Dhivehi language in Maldivian society today as well as give the reader a brief glimpse into the future of the language. It is in no way intended to be an in depth linguistic study of the language.

In writing this book I have mainly used research work done by other scholars as source material. I have relied heavily on the thesis by Sonja Fritz, *The Dhivehi Language: A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects*, Heidelberg 2001 and the thesis presented to Cornell University by Bruce D Cain; *Dhivehi (Maldivian) A Synchronic and Diachronic Study*. The material in the chapter on the Dhivehi writing systems has been taken directly from the book *Dhivehi Writing Systems* researched and compiled by the Special Advisor of the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research Ms Naseema Muhammad. Therefore I would like to acknowledge the hard work and research that these scholars and others have done on the language.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairman of the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research Mr Abbas Ibrahim, the Special Advisors of the Centre Ms Naseema Muhammad, Mr Muhammad Waheed and Mr Abdulla Sodiq and the Director Ms Naseema Ahmed for their continual support and encouragement. I would also like to thank the dedicated staff of the of the Centre for their support and assistance. Finally I would like to thank my family for always being there for me.

I hope that this book will be interesting and informative to many who wish find out more about the Dhivehi language.

Yumna Maumoon
Assistant Director

Contents

1- INTRODUCTION

Dhivehi is the official language of the island nation lying in the Indian Ocean known as the Republic of Maldives. It is spoken by a population of two hundred and seventy thousand (270,000) Maldivians and by a small population of approximately fifteen thousand (15,000) speakers who live on the island of Minicoy (India) where it is known as Mahl or Mahal.

Dhivehi represents the southernmost Indo-Aryan language in the world and even the southernmost Indo-European language. It is based on Sanskrit foundations and is closely related to the Sinhalese language spoken in Sri Lanka.[1] Dhivehi is written in a unique script called Thaana[2] which is written from right to left.

Little has been written (in a language other than Dhivehi) about the Dhivehi language or the Maldivian people. Up until the last decades of the 20th century, the Maldives was very isolated from the rest of the world and little was known in the outside world about the country, its people and their language. Hence, in order to understand the Dhivehi language, it is essential to have some knowledge of the country, the people and their history and culture.

[1] Sonja Gippert-Fritz, The Dhivehi Language: a Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects. Heidelberg 2001
[2] Pronounced *Tāna.* I have used the spelling *Thaana* as it is the official spelling used in the Maldives.

1.1 The Maldives

The Maldives is a group of 1192[3] small low-lying coral islands in the Indian Ocean spread across the equator approximately 130 km wide and 820 km long, covering an area of 90,000 square kilometres. These islands rise from long dead common plateaus of a vast submarine mountain range that extends southwards from the land mass of India.

The islands of the Maldivian archipelago are grouped into twenty-six natural rings or atolls. The islands are grouped into twenty atolls for administrative purposes. Only 199[4] islands are inhabited. The islands are very small, the largest being only a few kilometres in length. All the islands (except the island of Fua Mulaku) are very flat and covered with coconut trees. The climate of the Maldives is tropical; hot and humid. There have been fears that global warming and sea-level rise might lead to the total obliteration of the Maldive islands within the next century.

The present population of the Maldives is 270,101 with a sex ratio of 103 males per 100 females[5]. Approximately one-fourth of the total population live on the capital island, Malé which is an island of about one and a half square miles, situated approximately in the centre of the chain of islands.

The present-day Maldives is a small island developing country with a narrow resource base in relation to its population and lacking in known mineral resources. The country's economy is dependent on tourism and fishing and foreign imports.

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[3] Statistical Yearbook Of The Maldives 2002; Ministry of Planning and National Development, Male, Rep of Maldives. This number is variable as new islands are being continually formed while other islands are being eroded.
[4] Statistical Yearbook of the Maldives 2002; Ministry of Planning and National Development, Male, Rep of Maldives.
[5] Statistical Yearbook Of The Maldives 2002; Ministry of Planning and National Development, Male, Rep of Maldives.

1.2 The Maldivian People

The people of the Maldives are predominantly of Aryan stock. According to Albert Gray:

> As to its origin, the race which now inhabits the Maldivian archipelago (as well as Maliku or Minicoy islands) and which has occupied it from the earliest time of which we have any record is unquestionably of the same (Aryan) stock as the Sinhalese. This conclusion is borne out by evidence of language, physical traits, tradition, folklore, manners and customs.

However, little is known about whom the first settlers of the Maldives were or where they came from.

According to Professor Stanley Gardiner who visited the Maldives in 1899, to study the physical characteristics of the Maldivian people, Maldivians showed Aryan, African, Arab as well as Indonesian features. Even today, one can still see the same physical features. Some Maldivians have South Indian features while others have distinctly African features. Some have Arab features while others look Malay or Indonesian. So Maldivians can be said to be predominantly Indo-Aryan with an admixture of African, Arab and Indonesian blood.

1.3 History and Culture

There is no written history of the Maldives before its conversion to Islam in 1153 A.D. However, various archaeological sites, many of which are ruins of Buddhist temples, bear vivid testimony to the Buddhist past of the Maldives. Proper archaeological excavation, however, has been done only on one site in the Maldives namely the *Kuruhinna Tharāgandu* of Kaashidhoo[6]. A clam shell found at this site has been dated to 40 B.C. – A.D. 1157. This suggests that the Maldives has been inhabited for at least two thousand years. However, for lack of evidence the pre-Islamic history of the Maldivian archipelago remains practically unknown. It is not known who the first settlers in the Maldives were or where they came from.

Since there are no written records of the Maldives before its conversion to Islam in 1153 A.D, it is necessary to refer to external reports in order to get more information about the pre-Islamic past of the Maldives.

It is probable that the Maldives were already known to the Phoenicians. The ancient geographer, Claudius Ptolemaeus, who lived in the 2nd century A.D., mentions 1378 islands[8] nearby the island of Taprobane (Sri Lanka) which most probably refers to the Maldives and the Laccadives. In his report on the year 362 A.D, Ammianus Marcellinus informs his emperor Julian about "*Divae et Serendivae, nationes Indicae…*"[9] which are located in the Indian Ocean. He is most

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[6] Pronounced *kāšidū* however, I have used the conventional spelling used in the Maldives. The site at Kaashidhoo was excavated from 1996-1998 as a co-operation project between Dr Egil Mikkelson, Oslo University, Professor Solbritt Benneth, museum director and archeologist at The Museum of Medeival Stockholm and The National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, Malē.

[7] Archaeological Excavations of a Monastery at Kaashidhoo- Cowrie shells and their Buddhist context in the Maldives; Dr Egil Mikkelson, University of Oslo, Norway, National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, Male 2000.

[8] Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia I-III. Ed. C.F.A Nobbe. Leipzig 1843-45; repr. Hildesheim 1996. Lib. VII, Cap.4,11., 175.

[9] Ammianus Marcellinus, Romische Geschichte (Latin and German, commentary by W.SEYFARTH. part 3, book 22-25, 3rd ed., Darmstadt 1986; 1st ed. Berlin 1970) 20-21.

certainly referring to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. This reference to the Maldives shows that as early as the year 362 A.D., the Maldives was a known as a separate nation.

Another probable mention of the Maldives is in the Buddhist chronicle, the *Mahavamsa* which relates about the first migrations of Indo-Aryans to the Maldives and Sri Lanka. In the *Mahavamsa* the passage where the prince-regent Vijaya was cast out by his father, the legendary Sinhalese king Simhabahu, because of evil conduct Vijaya and his male friends as well as his wives and children were provided with three ships. These three ships put to sea and landed on different islands. The island where the women landed was called *Mahiladipaka* (Pali lit. "woman-island"; *mahila-* "woman" + *dīpā/ dvīpā* – "island" + suffix *–kā*).[10]

Mahaldīb, the Arabic name of the Maldives which was used by several Arab travellers and geographers was obviously derived from the Pali form *Mahiladīpika*.

The first Arab author to mention the Maldives is Al-Biruni who talks of Serendib (Ceylon) and the *Dībāgāt* or *Dībāgāt* islands (the Maldives and the Laccadives) as numerous islands scattered in the middle of the Indian Ocean, where the islands rise out of the water like sand-downs[11], in the book he wrote in 1030 A.D. about his travels in India. The first extensive description of the Maldives was given by the traveller Ibn Batuta (1304-1377) who calls the islands *Dībat al-Mahal*[12].

If the legend as told in the *Mahavamsa* has any truth, it indicates that maybe the first migrations of Indo-Aryans from

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[10] Sonja Gippert-Fritz, The Dhivehi Language: a Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and Its Dialect. Heidelberg 2001
[11] Alberuni's India translated by Edward C.Sachau. Vol I, p.233, London 1888/1914
[12] Ibn Batūtā; Ibn Batūtā in the Maldives and Ceylon, translated by Albert Gray, Journal Ceylon Branch of Royal Asiatic Society, 1982

the Indian sub-continent to Sri Lanka and the Maldives took place simultaneously. However, as there is no written evidence on the Maldivian side there is no way of knowing whether the first settlers to the Maldives came directly from the mainland or via Sri Lanka. Also the question of when the first settlers arrived in the Maldives remains unanswered.

Many questions about when the first settlers arrived in the Maldives or where they came from still remain to be answered. Archaeological or linguistic evidence may point to the answers. However, at present, much further study needs to be done in these areas before any of these questions can be answered.

1.3.1 The Conversion to Islam

The most significant event in the history of the Maldives is its conversion to Islam in 1153 A.D. The written history of the Maldives begins from this time. The names of the sultans who reigned in the Maldives since its conversion to Islam are documented without interruption.

The Maldives is said to have embraced Islam in 1153 A.D. when the king of the Maldives *Dhovimi Kalaminja* or *Sirī Tribhuvana Āditta Mahāradun* converted to Islam and ordered all his subjects to convert to Islam. After his conversion to Islam this king was known as *Al-sultān Muhammad ibn ‘Abdullah or Darumavanta Rasgefānu* (the Benevolent King).

Legend has it that the king was converted to Islam by an Arab traveller called Abul Barakāth Yūsuf al-Barbarī who, by reciting from the Qur’ān, exorcised a sea-demon known as the Rannamāri which terrorized the people of Male’. There is a

reference to this legend in the *Isdhoo Loamaafaanu*[13] written in 1195/1196.[14]

According to the *Isdhoo Loamaafaanu* the Maldives officially embraced Islam in 1153, however it took many years to convert the whole of the Maldives to Islam. At the time that the *Loamaafaanu* was written there were still some islands whose inhabitants had not converted to Islam.

Another legend in Hasan Tājuddīn's *Thareekh*[15] says that the Maldives was converted to Islam by a mystic called Yūsuf Šamsuddīn al-Tabrīzī from Tabrīz in Persia.[16]

In the accounts of his travels Ibn Batuta states that the Maldives was converted to Islam by Abul-Barakāt Yūsuf al-Barbarī. His tomb is the *Meduziārat* opposite the Male' Friday Mosque (*Hukuru miskit*)[17]. He says this based on the inscription he saw on the wooden plaque found in Male' Friday Mosque when he visited the Maldives in 1343-4. This wooden plaque is in the National Museum at present. However, there is some confusion about the name of the traveller who converted the Maldives to Islam as the writing on the plaque is not clearly legible because of its present condition.

Whoever converted the Maldives to Islam, or under whatever circumstances the Maldives converted, the conversion to Islam can be said to be the most significant event in Maldivian history and it changed the Maldivian way of life dramatically. It affected every aspect of their lives, their way of thinking, their culture and their language. After conversion to Islam

[13] pronounced *Isdū Lōmāfānu* however I have used the official spelling used in the Maldives which is *Loamaafaanu* –these are official records of land grants, written on copper plates, given to mosques built by Sultans after the Maldives converted to Islam.
[14] *Isdhoo Loamaafaanu* – copper-plate grant written in 1195/1196 found in the *Isdhoo* mosque.
[15] Pronounced *Tārīx* however I have used the official spelling used in the Maldives which is *Thaareekh.*
[16] H.C.P.Bell; The Maldive Islands. Monograph on the Histroy, Archeology and Epigraphy; Ceylon Government Press, Colombo, 1940
[17] Muhammad Amin, 1949

Arab influences on the Maldivian economy, culture and language were very strong.

In order to understand the various factors that influenced Maldivian culture and the Dhivehi language it is important to take a look at the most significant events in Maldivian history.

1.3.2 Significant Events in the History of the Maldives

The written history of the Maldives begins from the time of its conversion to Islam. The *Thareekh* [18] covers a period of 670 years of Maldivian history from the reign of Sultan Muhammad ul ‘Ādil (1142-1176 A.D.) to the reign of Sultan Muhammad Mu`īnudīn I (1799-1835 A.D). Apart from political events the *Thareekh* also covers natural occurrences such as earthquakes, tidal waves, eclipses, etc.

Another source of Maldivian history is the *Raadhavalhi*[19] which is a chronological list of all the kings and the queens who ruled the Maldives after Islamization, and gives some information not found in the *Thareekh*. Apart from these sources the four *Loamafaanu* or copper-plate grants are valuable sources.

According to legend, and according to the few written sources available, one of the events which had a deep impact on the Maldivian way of life was the taking over the sovereignty of the islands by the Portuguese during the 16th century.

[18] Hassan Tājuddīn’s *Thareekh*
[19] *Rādavali* I have used the official spelling used in the Maldives which is *Raadhavalhi.*

In early 16th century the Portuguese established themselves in Goa (India) and tried to control the trade routes from Africa to the Far East. Goa became the headquarters for their activities and they became formidable in controlling the sea trade and they started taking over small and weak territories in the region.

At that time, there were ships carrying spices and other valuable commodities travelling through the Maldives and high quality Maldivian coir was being used all over South Asia for rigging. The Portuguese wanted to occupy the Maldives in order to control the sea trade as well as get Maldivian coir and dried fish.

The Portuguese conquered the Maldives in 1558 A.D. and ruled for fifteen years. This period is known in Maldivian history as a period of terror and violence when the Portuguese tried to convert Maldivians to Christianity by force.

Portuguese rule was finally brought to an end by the Mohammad Thakurufaanu (who is revered as a national hero) and his two brothers who organized a resistance and took over the islands under Portuguese control. After eight years of guerrilla fighting, the Utheemu brothers took over the capital Male' and ended the Portuguese rule. The Portuguese, however, continued to raid the Maldives for another seventy-five years.

Another instance of foreign influence on the Maldives was the period when the country was under a protectorate treaty with the British in 1887. With this treaty the Maldives gave up its right to sign treaties with other countries while the British agreed to protect the Maldives from foreign influences without interfering with country's internal affairs. The British interest in the Maldives was purely strategic. They wanted to prevent the Maldives getting into the hands of other colonial powers of the time, namely the French and the Dutch. The impact of the

British on the Maldivian economy, politics and society was minimal compared to the experience of other countries under the direct colonial rule of the British. Hence the British did not have much influence on Maldivian culture.

The dawn of the 20th century saw many political changes taking place in the Maldives. The institution of the Sultanate had become weak and educated people with a modern outlook wanted to change the political system. In 1932, the first written constitution of the Maldives was passed by Sultan Muhammad Šamsuddīn. A Citizens' Majlis and a Council of Ministers came into existence. However this constitution was abolished in 1933 and another constitution was redrawn in 1934. This was a time of great political unrest in the Maldives. During this period the Maldives was ruled by the Hasan Farīd and Muhammad Amīn Dīdī who was later to become the first president of the Republic of Maldives.

In 1953, after the death of the Sultan designate Abdul Majīd Dīdī, a public referendum was held to decide whether the people wanted a monarchy or a republic, and with the consent of the people the Maldives was declared a Republic with Muhammad Amīn Dīdī as its first president. His new Republican constitution gave voting rights to women.

Amīn Dīdī was a visionary and a pioneer in modernizing the Maldives. He introduced the idea of modern schools, modern health facilities, and he introduced modern technology such as the telephone, power plant, etc. He started education for women. In this way he made many valuable contributions towards the development and modernization of the country.

However despite his vision there was opposition to some of his ideas and this was aggravated by the food shortages that the Maldives experienced during the aftermath of the Second World War. As a result in August 1953, while Amīn Dīdī was abroad, there was an uprising against the government and the

Constitution was suspended. On his return to the Maldives Amīn was arrested and sentenced to be banished for an attempted coup d'etat. Amīn Dīdī died in January 1954 while still in banishment.

The first Republic ended with the death of Amīn Dīdī and the Sultanate was once again revived under another constitution in March 1954. Muhammad Farīd Dīdī the son of Abdul Majīd Dīdī became the Sultan.

On 26th July 1965, the Maldives became independent from the British. This day is marked as the Maldivian Independence Day.

On 11th November 1968 the Maldives was again declared a Republic, after a public referendum, and the prime minister at the time Mr Ibrāhim Nāsir became the first president of the second Republic. Many socio-economic changes took place during Nasir's term in office. Tourism was introduced to the Maldives in the early 1970s. The fishing industry and the shipping lines improved the country's economy. The country opened more and more to the outside world. Consumer items started coming into the Maldive islands. Modernization and opening up to the outside world started to bring many changes to the traditional way of life.

In 1978, the current president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom was elected to the office of the president. He has since then been re-elected for four consecutive terms (in 1983, 1988, 1993 and 1998). Under the leadership of President Gayoom the country has seen remarkable improvement in the country's economy through major developments in tourism and fisheries industries. There has also been vast improvement in social services such as health and education (especially to the outer atolls). Universal primary education has been achieved and access to secondary education has been increasing steadily

with setting up of atoll schools. Well-balanced foreign relations is also a notable achievement.

President Gayoom is well-known to the world today especially through his stand on environment issues. He has repeatedly brought the world's attention to the issues of global warming and sea-level rise and its effects on small island states such as the Maldives.

Today the Maldives is renowned in the world of international tourism and it enjoys the highest literacy, highest per capita income and the highest value for its money among the South Asian countries.

During the past two decades the economy of the Maldives has undergone a dramatic transformation with new economic activities such as construction, trade, transport and communication sprouting around the tourism sector

The developments in the latter part of the 20th century such as the growth of tourism, modernization, and the opening up of the country to the outside world has had great impact on the Maldivian way of life and way of thinking. Before these developments, Maldivians lived a traditional way of life based on fishing (and agriculture in some islands). These changes have affected every aspect of the Maldivian way of life, culture and language. Therefore in order to understand the development of the Dhivehi language and the factors which influenced it, one has to have some understanding of the Maldivian way of life and the changes that are taking place in the Maldives today with the advent of modernization.

1.3.3 Culture

During the course of Maldivian history a unique Maldivian island culture has developed in close harmony with the island environment. This includes uniquely Maldivian ways of

building houses and boats, preparing food, clothing, medicine, craft-making techniques, music and dance, rituals and social practices that form part of everyday life.

Traditionally Maldivians were either fishermen or farmers who lived in small island communities. Their life was very much connected to their natural surroundings, especially to the sea. This strong link is reflected in the Dhivehi language. For example, Dhivehi has many names for the different parts of the sea surrounding an island, *mūdu* 'the shallow part of the sea near an island, *vilu* 'the deeper darker part of the sea away from the island', *ka^{n}du* 'deep sea'. Dhivehi has different names for different types of islands, for example, *ra* 'island' *finolu* 'small island without any coconut trees', *faru* 'reef'. The word 'atoll' is a word that the English language has borrowed from Dhivehi *atolu* 'a number of islands naturally arranged in a ring formation'. Dhivehi also has names for a great variety of fish that are found in the waters of the Maldives. Many of the proverbs and figures of speech in Dhivehi and much of the imagery in Dhivehi oral literature, such as the *raivaru* poetry is also connected to the sea and the island environment. Hence, we can see that the island environment of the Maldives has played a very important role in the development of the Maldivian way of life as well as in the development of the Dhivehi language.

Oral literature and traditions were a very important part of traditional Maldivian way of life. An example is the raivaru poetry of the Maldives which is a special type of Dhivehi poetry recited in a certain manner. Epic poems such as *'Don Hiyala āi Alifulu'*[20] were originally recited in the *raivaru* form. The oral traditions of the Maldives is rich in stories of folk heroes and heroines and tales of love and the supernatural. Craft-making was also an important part of the traditional

[20] Epic Dhivehi poem about two star-crossed lovers passed down from generation to generation through oral recitation in the raivaru form.

Maldivian society. Crafts such as *kunā*[21]-making and lacquer work are still carried on today. Maldivians have their own unique forms of music and dance such as bodu beru, *mālinešun* etc.

As discussed above traditional Maldivian society had its own ways of building houses, boats, practising herbal medicine, its own folk music, dance and ritual practices and the Dhivehi language is rich in words to with all the spheres of the traditional Maldivian way of life. However, it is not in the scope of this book to go into detail about these aspects of the traditional way of life of the Maldivians. The important thing, however, is to understand the dramatic changes that have taken place in Maldivian society over the last few decades with the advent of modernization and development. The traditional subsistence-based society is rapidly changing into a ‘modern’ ‘urban’ society. Many of the age-old customs and practices are being replaced by ‘modern’ ways of doing things and modern technology. Maldivian society has now entered the age of Information Technology (IT). It is now at a crossroad where the people have to maintain a delicate balance between their own unique cultural practices and a mass global culture.

[21] Traditional Maldivian hand-woven mat.

2-THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DHIVEHI LANGUAGE

Archaeological evidence as well as early references to the Maldives suggests that the Maldives has been inhabited for at least two thousand years. However, since there are no early documents or writing[22] of any sort it is difficult to do any research into the origin and early historical development of the Dhivehi language. However linguistic study of the different dialects of the Maldives as well as comparative linguistic study with other South Asian languages can give us a fair idea about the development of the Dhivehi language. Much research needs to be done in these areas before any firm conclusions to be reached.

2.1 Theories about the Origin of the Dhivehi Language

At present, there are several theories about the origin of the Dhivehi language from the studies done so far.

The foundation of the historical linguistic analysis of both Dhivehi and Sinhalese was laid by Wilhelm Geiger (1856 – 1943). In Geiger's comparative study of Dhivehi and Sinhalese he assumes that the Dhivehi language is a dialectical offspring of Sinhalese and therefore is a "daughter language" of Sinhalese.[23] However, the material he collected was not sufficient to judge the "degree of relationship" of Dhivehi and Sinhalese.[24]

Geiger concludes that Dhivehi must have split from Sinhalese not earlier that the 10th century A.D. This means that

[22] The earliest writing found to date is an inscription on a coral stone found in the year 2001, at the archaeological site at Landhoo in Noonu Atoll. The inscription is estimated to be from around the 6th C A.D.

[23] Wilhelm Geiger; Maldivian Linguistic Studies; Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1919, volume XXVII – Extra Number

[24] Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects. Heidelberg 2001.

migrations of Sinhalese people must have taken place around this time. However, there is nothing in Maldivian history or the Sinhalese chronicles, even in legendary form that alludes to such a migration. Furthermore, archaeological evidence as well as references to the Maldives in early writings show that the Maldives has been inhabited for nearly two thousand years.

Vitharana suggests that Dhivehi did not evolve as a separate language to Sinhala until 12th century A.D. when the Maldives converted to Islam[25], but Reynolds and others have suggested that Dhivehi started showing indications of divergence as early as the 4th century A.D.[26]

De Silva proposes that Dhivehi and Sinhalese must have branched off from a common mother language. He says that "the earliest Indic element in Maldivian (Dhivehi) is not so much a result of branching off from Sinhalese as a result of a simultaneous separation with Sinhalese from the Indic languages of the mainland of India".[27]

De Silva is referring to the Dravidian influences seen in the Dhivehi language such as in the old place names.

De Silva's theory is supported by the legend of Prince Vijaya as told in the *Mahavamsa* because if this legend is to be believed, the migration of Indo-Aryan colonists to the Maldives and Sri Lanka from the mainland (India) must have taken place simultaneously. This means that Dhivehi and Sinhalese must be "sister languages" that developed from a common Prakrit.[28]

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[25] Vitharana (1995:16)
[26] Reynolds (1974:197)
[27] De Silva, M.W.S Some Observations on the History of Maldivian in Transactions of the Philological Society, London 1970.
[28]Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects.Heidelberg 2001.

> However, "despite the research work that has been devoted to Dhivehi in recent times, and its results which also elucidate parts of the history of the language, it is still too early to decide with certainty whether Dhivehi and Sinhala developed at about the same time from a common Prakrit ancestor which would allow us to call them "sister languages" in the literal sense of the word, as proposed by De Silva. We cannot disprove the opposite that Dhivehi might represent a "daughter language" which split of from it in prehistoric time: it is clear however, that this time must have been much earlier than Geiger proposed".[29]

Therefore there is still no conclusive proof whether the Dhivehi language developed directly from Sinhalese or whether Dhivehi and Sinhalese developed simultaneously from a common Prakrit. There is also no way of proving when Dhivehi started developing as a separate language. As we can see there are differing theories about the origin of Dhivehi and the reason for such differences is that, on the one hand, Dhivehi shares features with Sinhala that appear relatively late while on the other hand it also shows significant indications of early divergence.

Whatever the origin of Dhivehi, linguists agree that Dhivehi is an Indo-Aryan language very closely related to Sinhalese, but which also has older Indic elements in it.

[29]Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects
Heidelberg 2001.

2.2 The Historical Layers of the Dhivehi Language

Dhivehi has a continuous written history of about eight hundred (800) years. That is from the time of the conversion to Islam. The earliest writings were on the *Loamaafaanu* (copper-plate grants) of the 12th and 13th centuries. Early inscriptions on coral stone have also been found. The oldest inscription found to date is an inscription on a coral stone found at an archaeological site on the island of Landhoo in Noonu Atoll. This inscription is estimated to be from the around the 7th or 8th century[30].

Linguistic studies show that Dhivehi is based on Sanskrit foundations and it developed in relative isolation with little contact with the other languages until the time of the conversion to Islam. Throughout its history Dhivehi seems to have had regular contact with Sinhalese (especially the southern dialects of Dhivehi).

The 800 years of continuous written history of Dhivehi can be broadly divided into the three periods Old Dhivehi, Middle Dhivehi and Modern Dhivehi, according to the different scripts used for writing Dhivehi. This can be seen in the table[31] below:

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[30] It has not been confirmed, as yet, whether this inscription is from the 7th or the 8th century A.D. National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, Male, Maldives. 2002

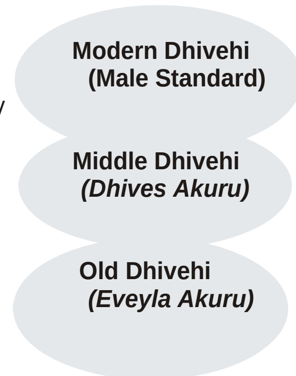
[31] Sonja Fritz: Presentation on the Historical Development of Dhivehi, Male 2002.

The historical layers of Dhivehi

Continuous **written history** of 800 years

Three periods

- **Modern Dhivehi**
  written in *Thaana*
  Ca. 1700 A.D.until today
- **Middle dhivehi**
  Written in *Dhives* Akuru
  Ca. 1450 until 1850
- **Old Dhivehi**
  written in *Eveyla* Akuru
  Ca. 1150 until 1450



2.3 Influences of other Languages on the Development of Dhivehi

Since the beginning of the written history of Maldives it can be seen that Dhivehi was influenced by many cultures and languages during the course of its development.

After the Maldives converted to Islam in 1153, Persian and Arabic made a significant impact on the Dhivehi language. It borrowed extensively from Arabic, especially religious and judicial terms. Early examples of borrowings from Persian and Arabic can be seen in early writings such as the *Loamaafaanu*. Examples are religious terms such *namādu* 'prayer' and *rōda* 'fasting', (Persian *namāzu*, *rōza*) and *kāfaru* 'infidel'(Arabic *kafir*[32]). Constant contact with Persian and Arab traders of the Indian Ocean meant that Dhivehi also borrowed many words a

[32] Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects

non-religious nature from Arabic and Persian. This is seen in many words in the field of navigation and shipping and words such as *ka^{n}dili* ‘a type of lamp’ (*qindīl* ‘candle, lamp Arabic/Persian) is found in the *Isdhoo Loamaafaanu.*[33]

Portuguese influence, from the period that the Maldives came under the colonial power of the Portuguese in the 16th century A.D., can be seen in words such as *lonsi* ‘hunting spear’ (Portuguese *lança* ‘spear’) and *mēzu* ‘table’ (Portuguese *mesa*).[34]

The middle of the 20th century saw many Maldivians going abroad to study in India, Pakistan and in some Arab countries and when these Maldivians returned home they used a lot of Urdu and Arabic words in their writing. As a result, Dhivehi (especially ‘literary’ or ‘learned’ Dhivehi) has a lot of Urdu as well as Arabic loan words. For example *bahāru* ‘spring’ (*bahāru* ‘spring’: Urdu), *gulšan* ‘garden’ (*gulšan* ‘garden’: Urdu) and so on. Words borrowed include words such as *galan* ‘pen’ (qalam ‘pen’) and *gamīs* ‘shirt’ (*qamīs* ‘shirt’: Arabic).

Around the 1970s and 1980s the English knowledge of Maldivians increased with educational opportunities and more and more Maldives started going abroad to study in Western countries. With the advent of tourism, the Maldives opened more and more to the outside world and the need for English language increased. The Government schools in Male’ (the capital) were teaching in English medium. Hence, Dhivehi language began to be greatly influenced by English. This can be seen in the great number of loan words from English. For example, *kāru* ‘car’ *baiskalu* ‘bicycle’, *iskūlu* ‘school’ and so on.

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[33] Hassan Maniku; A Concise Etymological Vocabulary of Dhivehi Language, The Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka, 2000.

[34] It is not clear whether these words came into Dhivehi directly from Portuguese. According to Hassan Maniku it is more likely that these words came into Dhivehi through Sinhala. Hassan Maniku; A Concise Etymological Vocabulary of Dhivehi Language, The Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka, 2000.

The latter half of the 20th century saw the Maldives undergoing modernization at a very fast pace. This also meant a sudden influx of new things, new ideas and concepts quite alien to the traditional Maldivian society. This also meant that the Dhivehi language had to face the challenge of finding ways of naming these new things and expressing these new ideas and concepts. As a result Dhivehi language borrowed extensively from the English language. For example all words to do with modern technology have been borrowed from English: *rēdiō* 'radio', *tīvī* 'TV', *co^{n}piutaru* 'computer' etc.

In addition to the borrowing of words from other languages Dhivehi phonology has also been greatly influenced by other languages. For example in 1957, eleven new letters were introduced into the *Thaana* alphabet to represent Arabic phonemes. This will be looked at in detail the section on the Dhivehi sound system.

The Dhivehi script also underwent a dramatic change through the influence of another language namely Arabic. The script changed from *Dhives Akuru* (written from left to write) to *Thaana Akuru* (written from right to left) around 1700 A.D. This dramatic change in script was brought about mainly to accommodate Arabic words into the script. In the late 1970s the *Thaana* script was replaced by the "*Latin* script", where Dhivehi was written in the Roman script, for a brief period of time. The scripts will be discussed in further detail in the section on the Dhivehi Writing Systems.

Up until the end of the 20th century Dhivehi evolved peacefully through contact with other languages. However, like many minority languages of the world today, Dhivehi language is facing the threat of the spread of a mass global culture.

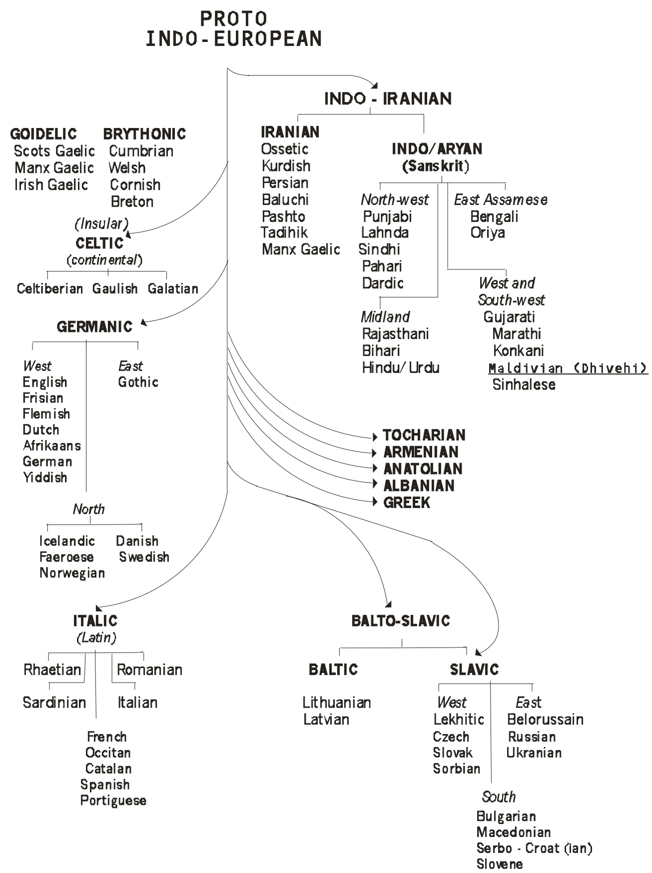
3. THE DHIVEHI LANGUAGE

Dhivehi language, *Dhivehi bas* or "island language" is the national language of the Maldive islands where it is spoken by a population of about two hundred and seventy thousand people. It is also spoken in Minicoy (India) where it is known as Mahl.

Linguists agree that Dhivehi is an Indo-Aryan language closely related to Sinhalese (spoken in Sri Lanka). Dhivehi represents the southernmost Indo-Aryan language and even the southernmost Indo-European language. Together with the closely related Sinhalese (the Indo-Aryan language spoken by the major part of Sri Lanka's population) Dhivehi establishes a special subgroup within the Modern Indo-Aryan languages.[35]

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[35] Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects, Heidelberg 2001.



Note: Table taken from David crystal: An Encyclopedic Dictionary Of Language and Languages, 1994

Dhivehi has always been more a spoken language than a written language. Therefore Dhivehi language has always been rich in oral literature such as the *raivaru* poetry of the Maldives. “Concerning its vocabulary, grammatical categories and its stylistic possibilities Dhivehi is not a “poor” language at all given its abundant dialectal variation on the one hand and its rich tradition of folklore on the other”[36].

Dhivehi has relatively meagre written sources as not much was written in Dhivehi until very recent times. It was only during the 1950s and 1960s during the time of Amīn Dīdī that literary writing in Dhivehi began.

Dhivehi has several notable dialects. The standard dialect or Modern Standard Dhivehi is the dialect used in the capital Male’ and the central atolls. This is the official dialect used in written Dhivehi and taught in schools. The relationship of the written language to Modern Standard Dhivehi is quite close. Dialects from the far north down to Laamu Atoll are quite closely related to the standard. The greatest dialectal variation is found in the far south in Huvadhu, Fua Mulaku and Addu atolls where each atoll has its own dialect more closely related to each other, but very different from those of the north.[37]

Dhivehi is written in its own unique script called *Thaana* which is written from right to left. The *Thaana* script has influences of other South Asian scripts as well as Arabic.[38]

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[36] Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects, Heidelberg 2001.
[37] Wijesundera et al: Historical and Linguistic Survey of Dhivehi, Final Report, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka,1988.
[38] Writing Systems of the World; J.W.Gair and B.D Cain , Section 50: Dhivehi Writing Systems

3.1 Modern Standard Dhivehi[39]

Modern Standard Dhivehi is the standard language used in written Dhivehi and all formal communication and taught at schools. Standard Dhivehi is based on the Malé dialect. In this chapter we will look at the sound system, and the basic morphology and grammar of Modern Standard Dhivehi language.

3.1.1 The Sound System

The sound system of Dhivehi is similar to that of South Indian languages. Like other Modern Indo-Aryan languages the Dhivehi phonemic inventory shows an opposition of long and short vowels, of dental and retroflex consonants as well as single and geminate consonants.[40]

[39] The contents of this chapter is mainly from Bruce D.Cain; Dhivehi (Maldivian) A Synchronic and Diachronic Study, PhD thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School and Cornell University.

[40] Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects, Heidelberg 2001.

The following table shows the segmental phonemes of Dhivehi:

Dhivehi Consonants		**Labial**	**Dental**	**Retroflex**	**Palatal**	**Velar**
Stops	Voiceless	p	t	ṭ	c	k
	Voiced	b	d	ḍ	j	g
	Prenasalized	^{m}b	^{n}d	$^{n}ḍ$		^{n}g
Nasals		m	n		(ñ)	
Semivowels						y
Lateral			l	ḷ		
Flap				r		
Fricative	Voiceless Voiced	f v	s z	Š		h

Dhivehi Vowels

i	u	ī		ū
e	o	ē		ō
	A		Ā	

Dental and retroflex stops are contrastive in Dhivehi. For example: *madun* means 'quietly' *madun* means 'seldom'. The segments /t/ and /d/ are articulated just behind the front teeth. Dhivehi retroflex segments / ṭ/, /d/, /š/ and /l/ are produced at the very rear part of the alveolar ridge.

Dhivehi has prenasalized stops ^{m}b, ^{n}d, ^{n}d, and ^{n}g. Examples are *ha^{n}du* 'moon' and *ha^{n}du* 'uncooked rice' and *a^{n}ga* 'mouth'. These segments only occur intervocalically. Dhivehi

and Sinhala are the only Indo-Aryan languages that have prenasalized stops.[41]

The influence of other languages has played a great role in Dhivehi phonology. For example the phoneme /z/ comes entirely from foreign influence: *gāzi* 'judge' is from Persian, *māzi* 'past' is from Urdu.

The phoneme /p/ also occurs only in borrowed words in Modern Standard Dhivehi (for example *ripōtu* 'report'). At one point Maldivian (Dhivehi) did not have the phoneme /f/, and /p/ occurred in the language without contrastive aspiration. Some time in the 1600s word initial and intervocalic /p/ changed to /f/ perhaps as a result of Arabic influence.[42] Historical documents from the 11th century, for example, show five rendered as */pas/* whereas today it is */fas/*.[43]

In standard Dhivehi when the phoneme /s/ occurs in the final position of a word it changes to /h/ intervocalically when inflected. For example *bas* 'word' becomes *bahek* 'a word' and *mas* 'fish' becomes *mahek* 'a fish'. /s/ and /h/ are sometimes contrastive. For example word initially *hingā* 'operating' and *singā* 'lion' and intervocalically aharu 'year' and asaru 'effect'.

/š/ a retroflex grooved fricative is peculiar to Dhivehi among the Indo-Aryan languages. In some dialects it is pronounced as [r] a voiceless retroflex flap or trill.

Modern Standard Dhivehi has borrowed many phonemes from Arabic. These phonemes are used exclusively in loan words from Arabic, for example, the phoneme /x/ in words such as *xādim* 'male servant' (Arabic). The following table shows the

[41] Bruce D.Cain; Dhivehi (Maldivian) A Synchronic and Diachronic Study, PhD thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School and Cornell University
[42] Geiger 1919: 116
[43] Disanayake 1986: 69

phonemes that have been borrowed from Arabic together with their transliteration into Thaana.

The vowel system of modern Dhivehi is strictly symmetrical. It has five basic vowels with two degrees of vowel length:

/a/ and /ā/:	/kaši/ 'thorn'	and	/kāši/ 'coconut'
/i/ and /ī/:	/biru/ 'fear'	and	/bīru/ 'deaf'
/u/ and /ū/:	/duni/ 'bow'	and	/dūni/ 'bird'
/e/ and /ē/:	/beru/ 'drum'	and	/bēru/ 'outside'
/o/ and /ō/:	/bok/ 'frog'	and	/bō/ 'head'

3.1.2 Nominal Morphology

The nominal system of Dhivehi comprises nouns, pronouns, adjectives and numerals as parts of speech.

Nouns

Dhivehi nouns fall into two categories: human and non-human. The difference is most clearly seen in plural inflections. For example *mīhā* 'person' (definite, singular) becomes *mīh-un* 'people' while *kakuni* 'crab' becomes *kakuni-tak*. Sometimes the plural suffix *–men* is used with a few kinship terms. For example, *bappamen* 'fathers' (*bappa* 'father + *-men*)

Grammatical gender is absent. For example, adjective and noun agreement patterns do not show gender classes. For example: *fas fot* 'five books', *fas gas* 'five trees' *fas masverin* 'five fishermen', *fas anhenun* 'five women' do not show any gender classes.

Dhivehi has largely dropped the grammatical gender in favour of human and non-human notional gender.[44] This distinction between human and non-human notional gender classes is important in the formation of plurals (as described above) and in the selection of case endings (see section below).

3.1.2a .The Dhivehi Case System

Dhivehi has five cases for both human and non-human referents.

	Non-Human	Human
Direct:	*fot [foy]* 'book'	*dari* 'son/daughter'
Dative:	*fot-aš [fota]* 'to the book'	*dariy-aš* 'to the son / daughter
Genetive:	*fotu-ge* 'of the book'	*dar ī-ge* 'the son's / daughter's
Instrumental	*fotu-n* 'from the book'	*dar ī-ge faratu-n*'from the son's/ daughter's side
Locative:	*fotu-ga* 'in the book'	*dar ī-ge gai-gā* ' in/ on the son's / daughter's body

Note that the declensions of human and non-human substantives differ in the instrumental and locative cases. The human substantive does not use instrumental and locative cases as such, but postposition phrases with the same function.

The direct case consists only of the stem and includes nominative and accusative case functions. Other case endings are added to the stem. If the stem ends in a consonant then a /u/ is added if the case ending begins with a consonant. For

[44] Bruce D.Cain; Dhivehi (Maldivian) A Synchronic and Diachronic Study, PhD thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School and Cornell University

example *fot* 'book' becomes *fotu-ge* 'book-GEN'. Stems ending in short vowels other than /u/ lengthen it before genitive and locative cases. For example *dida* 'flag' becomes *didā-gā* flag-LOC.

The locative case marker has three freely alternating forms: -*gā,-ga* and -*gai*. The -*gai* form appears mostly in written texts.

3.1.2b Inflections for Number, Definiteness and Indefinitess

In Modern Standard Dhivehi, non-human nouns do not inflect for number generally. For example *ek fot* 'one book', *de fot* 'two books' and *tin fot* 'three books' and so on. For human nouns the singular and plural forms are used: *mīhek* 'person (indefinite singular) and *de mīhun* 'two people', *tin mīhun* and so on.

The plural suffix –*tak* is used for both human and non-human nouns when the number is not specified. For example *fot-tak* 'books', *mīhun-tak* 'people'.

Dhivehi has three categories of definiteness: definite, indefinite and unspecified. The definite for non-human nouns is the stem form: *fot* '(the) book' For human referents there is the definite suffix *ā*: *māvadiy-ā* 'the head carpenter'. Indefinite is marked with the suffix ek which is derived from the numeral one. The unspecified marker is *aku*: *mīh-aku* 'some person' (unspecified).

Suffixing of the numeral 'one' to indicate indefinite is unique to Dhivehi and Sinhala among the modern Indic languages (with the exception of Nuri).[45]

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45 Wijayaratne 1956: 180.

In Dhivehi the indefinite suffix can occur with plurals of both human and non-human nouns to designate an unknown quantity: *mīhun-tak-ek* 'people-unspecified / unknown quantity', *fot-tak-ek* 'some books' unspecified / unknown quantity. This usage is not found in Sinhala.[46]

3.1.2c. Demonstrative Pronominals

Dhivehi has three basic demonstrative adjective / pronouns that indicate spatial deixis as follows:

mi	'this, these': proximity to the speaker
ti/tiya	'that, those': proximity to the hearer
e	'that, those': distant from both the speaker and the hearer

The Dhivehi demonstratives can stand alone for pronouns for inanimate objects without further inflection. The *e* 'that, those' is used to refer to something already mentioned or understood in the discourse: *e-dhuvahu* 'that day, *e-thaa* 'that place'

[46] De Silva 1970:152

3.1.2d. Personal Pronominal Forms

The basic personal pronominal system of standard Dhivehi is as follows:

aharen/ma	'I'	*aharemen/mamen*	'we'
timanna	'I'(first person in reported speech)		
kalē	'you'	*kalēmen*	'you all'
ēnā *mīna*	(s)he	*emīhun/ebaimīhun*	'they'/those people
ēti	'it' 'that thing'	*ēccehi*	'those things'

Note that the third person pronouns consist of the demonstrative *e* 'that' followed by other nominals: *ēti* (*e eti*), *emīhun* (*e mīhun*). All the pronouns beginning with e have alternate forms relating to proximal distinctions. For example *ēna*, the generic third person singular, (s)he is used to denote a person at a distance from the speaker and the addressee while *mīna* (s)he is used to denote a person near the speaker.

The pronoun *timan/timanna* is used for the first person in reported speech.

The pronouns given in the above table are the pronouns used among equals or in informal situations. There are other pronouns used when addressing a superior or in more formal situations:

aluga^{n}du	'I'	*aluga^{n}dumen*	'we'
tiyabēfula	'you'	*tiyabēfulun*	'you all'
ebēfula	(s)he	*ebēfulun*	'they'

The pronouns given above are those most commonly used in Modern Standard Dhivehi. There are some archaic forms such as *i*^{m}*ba* ‘you’ which is not used in standard Dhivehi anymore though it is still used in some dialects.

In Dhivehi, religious vocabulary has special pronouns. In prayer the first person singular is *alu* (literally ‘slave’) and the first person plural is *alamen*. The first person pronoun for Allah is *timansuvāmīnge* ‘I’(God). The first person pronoun for the Prophet Muhammad is *timankalēgefānu* where *kalēgefānu* is a high ranking honorific title.

3.1.2e Interrogative Pronominals

Dhivehi question words begin with *k-*, a feature shared with many Indo-Aryan languages.[47] The following are the interrogative particles of Dhivehi:

kāku	‘who’	*kon*	‘which?’
kobā	‘where’	*kīk*	‘what?’
kihinek	‘how?’	*kīvve*	‘why?’
koniraku	‘when?’ (literally ‘which time’?)		

3.1.3 Numerals

Dhivehi uses two numeral systems. Both of them are identical up to 30. After 30, however, one system places the unit numeral stem before the decade (for example *et-tirīs* ‘31’ one and thirty) while the other combines the stem of the decade

[47] Bruce D.Cain; Dhivehi (Maldivian) A Synchronic and Diachronic Study, PhD thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Cornell University

with the unit numeral (for example *tirīs-ekek* ‘31’ thirty + one). The latter system also has numerals multiplied by ten for decades 70, 80, and 90.

The following table shows the Dhivehi numeral 1-40, the decades up to 100, etc.

Dhivehi Numerals

No	Stem	Nominal	No	Numeral	No	Numeral
0	sun	sumek				
1	sk [e﷽]	ekek	**11**	egāra	**21**	ekāvīs
2	de	dek	**12**	bāra	**22**	bāvīs
3	tin	tinek	**13**	tēra	**23**	tēvīs
4	hataru	hatarek	**14**	sāda	**24**	sauvīs
5	fas	fahek	**15**	fanara	**25**	fansavīs
6	ha	hayek	**16**	sōla	**26**	sabbīs
7	hat [hay ?]	hatek	**17**	satāra	**27**	hatāvīs
8	aš [a﷽]	ašek	**18**	ašāra	**28**	asavīs
9	nuva	nuvayek	**19**	navāra ona vihi	**29**	navāvīs ona tiris
10	diha	dihayek	**20**	vihi	**30**	tirīs

No	Numeral-Decade	Decade - Numeral	No	Numeral - Decade	Decade - Numeral
31	ettirīs	tirīs ekek	**50**	fansās	fansās
32	battirīs	tirīs dek	**60**	hatti	fasdolas
33	tettirīs	tirīs tinek	**70**	hayttari	hayddiha
34	sauratirīs	tirīs hatarek	**80**	āhi	addiha
35	fansatirīs	tirīs fahek	**90**	navai	nuvadiha
36	satirīs	tirīs hayek			
37	satutirīs	tirīs hatek	**100**	satēka	
38	ašutirīs	tirīs ašek	**200**	duisatta	
39	onasālīs	tirīs nuvayek	**300**	tin sateka	
40	salīs	salīs	**1000**	ek hās	

Numerals 1-10 have a stem form used adjectivally and in compounds, and an indefinite form used for counting.

The decade plus numeral system is used more currently. This system has remnants of an older system. The decade *fas dolas* '60' (literally 'five twelves') comes from a much older duodecimal system which has nearly disappeared in the Maldives. This number system was used for very special purposes, connected to the Maldivian way of life, such as counting coconuts. In this system the number 1-10 was the same as those given in the above table, but from 11 upward the system was reckoned by twelves[48]. For example *dolahek* is '12' and *dolas ekek* is 13 (literally 12+1)

11	*ekolahek / ekolas*	22	*dolas dihayek*	48	*fanas*
12	*dolahek / dolas*	23	*dolas ekolas*	60	*fas dolas*
13	*dolas ekek*	24	*fassihi*	72	*f āhiti*
14	*dolas dēk*	25	*fassihi ekek…,*	84	*hayddolas etc*
15	*dolas tinek* …, etc	36	*tin dolas*	96	*hiya*

This duodecimal system is not known in Sri Lanka or in India so it is unique to the Maldives. A duodecimal system was used in Mesopotamia but how this system could have come to the Maldives is a matter of speculation.[49]

In the Dhivehi numeral system ordinals are derived by adding – *vana* to the stem form of the numeral. For example:

first	*evvana (ek+vana)*	twentieth	*vihi-vana*
second	*de-vana*	thirtieth	*tirīs-vana*
third	*tin-vana…* etc	fiftieth	*fansās-vana…* etc

[48] Maniku 1995: 9-10y
[49] Maloney 1980: 134-137

3.1.4 Verbal Morphology

The Dhivehi verbal system is characterized by a derivational relationship between active, causative and involitive/intransitive verb forms:

Active	Invol/Intrans.	Causative
hadanī 'making'	*hedenī* 'growing'	*haddanī* 'to cultivate
vattani 'dropping'	*vetteni* 'falling'	*vattuvani* 'to make someone drop'
našanī 'dancing'	*nešenī* 'dancing involuntarily'	*nattuvanī* 'to make someone dance'

Generally verbs with thematic vowel –*a*- stems are active or causative (for example *hadanī* / *haddanī*) while verbs with a thematic vowel –*e*- stems are involitive or intransitive (for example *hedenī*).

However, some verbs with *e*-thematic vowel stems are active and transitive (for example, *kule-nī* 'playing') while some verbs with *a*-thematic vowel stems are semantically involitive (for example, *kassa-nī* 'sliding' involitive / intransitive).

Honorifics play an important role in Dhivehi. A form very similar to the causative form is used for honorific verbs. For example:

verb		honorific verb
vattanī	dropping'	*vattavanī*
našanī	'dancing'	*nattavanī*
hadanī	'making'	*haddavanī*

3.1.4a. Verbal inflections

In terms of how verbs pattern together morphologically, the division between polysyllabic and monosyllabic verb stems is an important one as polysyllabic verbs are far more regular than the monosyllabic ones[50]. The present stem, past stem, and present participle provide the basis of various finite and medial verbs in Dhivehi.

The following table gives the Dhivehi verb paradigm.

Dhivehi Verb Paradigm (arranged by stem)

	Mono.	Poly -a-	-n- Stems	IN- verbs
Present Stem	ka-	jaha -	ganna-	enge -
	'eat'	strike'	'get'	' know'
Finite:				
Pres. Pro.	kanī	jahanī	gannanī	e^{n}ge -
future	kāne	jahāne	gannāne	e^{n}gēne
Future.N3	kānan	jahānan	gannānan	
Fut . Pro..	kānī	jahānī	gannānī	e^{n}gēnī
Habit. N3	kan	jahan	gannan	
Habitual	kai	jahā	ganē	e^{n}gē
Imperative	kai	jahā	ganē	
Hortative	kamā	jahamā	gannamā	
Medial				
Pres.Rel.	kā	jahā	ganna	e^{n}gē
Infinitive	kān	jahan	gannan	e^{n}gen
Reason	kātī	jahātī	gannātī	e^{n}getī
Simult	kamun	jahamun	gannamun	e^{n}gemun
Simult	kanikoš	jahanikoš	gannanikoš	e^{n}genikoš

[50] Wijesundera et al. A Historical and Linguistic Survey of Dhivehi; 1988, 54-57.

Past Stem	kei -	jehi -	gat-	e^{n}gunu
Finite				
Past	kei	jehi	gat	e^{n}gunu
Past.N3	kein	jehin	gatin	
Past Pro.	keī	jehī	gatī	e^{n}gunī
Irrealis	keīs	jehīs	gatīs	engunīs
Irrealis.N3	keīmus	jehīmus	gatīmus	
Medial:				
Past Rel.	kei	jehi	gat	e^{n}gunu
Temporal	keīma	jehīma	gatīma	e^{n}gunīma
Inchoat	keīssure	jehīssure	gatīssure	e^{n}dunīssure
Concess	keyas	jehiyas jessas	gatas	e^{n}gunas
Pres Participle	kai	jahai	gane	e^{n}gi
Finite:				
Perfect	kaifi	jahaifi	ganefi	e^{n}gijje
perfect . N3	kaifin	jahaifin	ganefin	
Optative	kaifāne	jahaifāne	ganefāne	e^{n}gidāne
Opt. N3	kaifānan	jahaifānan	ganefānan	….
Medial:				
Cond.	kaifiyyā	jahaifiyyā	ganefiyyā	engijjeyyā
Suc - gen	kaigen	jahaigen	ganegen	engigen
Suc - fa	kaifā	jahāfā jahaifā	ganefā	engifā

Habitual is the same as “simple present” (*kai* ‘s/he eats’).

Progressive (Pro) indicates a progressive or continuous aspect (*kanī* ‘eating’)

Irrealis indicates a counterfactual state or activity as in “x would have done y” (*keīs* ‘x would have eaten)

Reason “because x does y”	(*kātī* ‘because x eat/s)
Temporal “when/because”	(*keīma* ‘when x had eaten’ or ‘because x had eaten’
Inchoactive “since”	(*keīssure* ‘since x ate’)
Simultaneous “while”	(*kamun* ‘while eating’ *kanikoš* ‘while eating’)
Concessive “even if”	(*keyas* ‘even if x eat/s)
Hortative “let’s…”	(*kamā* ‘let’s eat)

Note: N3 means non-third person meaning I/you/we.

As we can see from the above table, Dhivehi verbs fall into four main categories as determined by the shape of the present stem.

Dhivehi also has a number of irregular verbs that show a mixed pattern of inflection.

3.1.4b Compound Verbs

Dhivehi has many compound verbs. For example the verb *gannanī* ‘taking/getting/ buying’ is used in compound constructions to indicate a reflexive action. For example, verbs like *biru gannanī* ‘to be afraid’ (literally ‘to get fear’) and *ladu gannanī* ‘to be shy’ (literally ‘to get shyness/ shame) are compounds formed from this verb.

One of the most common ways that a compound verb is formed is a noun or adjective followed by an inflected verb such as *kuranī* ‘to do/to make’ which is used very often. For example *bodu kuranī* ‘raising children’ (bodu ‘big’ + kuranī ‘to do/to make’) or *bēs kuranī* ‘to treat’ (*bēs* ‘medicine’+ *kuranī* ‘to do’).

These are the main characteristics of the verbal morphology of Dhivehi. However, this chapter will not go into further detail as this is a very complex subject and beyond the scope of this book.

3.2 The Dialects of Dhivehi

The speakers of Dhivehi are scattered over twenty atolls separated by vast expanses of sea. The geographical circumstances have prevented the people of the different atolls (especially those of the southern atolls) from being in close contact with each other. This has led to remarkable dialectal differentiation among Dhivehi speakers.

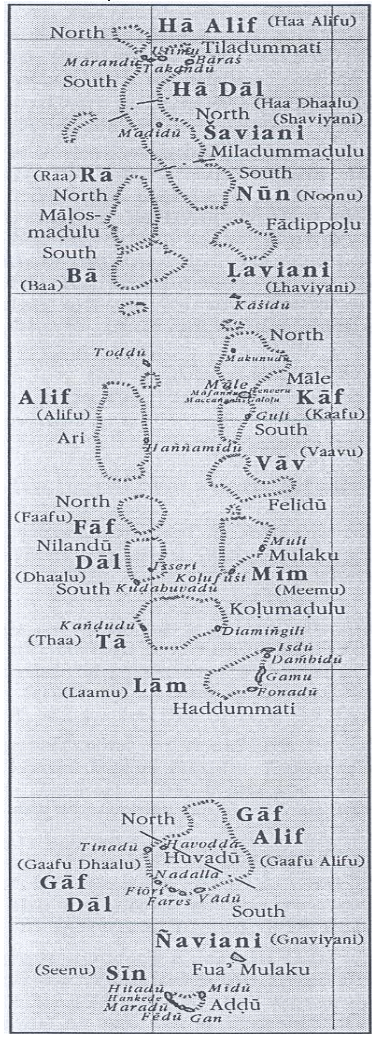
Dhivehi groups can be broadly grouped into a northern and a southern dialect. The northern dialect refers to the dialects spoken from the island of Minicoy up to Haddunmati (Laamu Atoll). The dialects spoken in the north do not show much differentiation and is very close to Standard Dhivehi.

The northernmost dialect of Dhivehi can be said to be the dialect spoken in Maliku (Minicoy) known as Mahl. This dialect is still mutually intelligible with Standard Dhivehi

The southern dialect refers to the dialects spoken in the three southern atolls traditionally called Huvadū, Fua Mulaku and Addū atoll.[51]

[51] The modern official names used for administrative purposes are *Gāf Alif* / *Gāf Dāl* atoll, *Ñaviyani* atoll and *Sīn* Atoll.

Map of the Maldives



These three atolls are geographically separated from the rest of the Maldives and this has resulted in great dialectal differences between these three atolls and the rest of the Maldives .The dialectal differences between these southern dialects and the northern dialects are so great that speakers of the northern dialects have difficulty understanding the southern dialects. However, speakers of the southern dialects understand the northern dialects, because of acquired intelligibility, as the northern dialects are so close to standard Dhivehi. There are also considerable differences between the dialects of three southern atolls. The tables below show some of the differences between Standard Dhivehi and the dialects of Haddunmati, Huvadū Atoll, Fua Mulaku and Addū Atoll.

Demonstratives

demonstrative	Standard	Huvadu	Addu	Fua Mulaku
This (near me)		mi	mī	mī
That (near you)	tiya ti		tē	
That (over there)	e	eh	eh	eh/ē

Demonstrative	Standard	Haddunmati	Huvadu	Addu	Fua Mulaku
here (near me)	mitā		mitan	mitān mibē	mitan
there (near you)	tiyatā			tētān	
there (over there)	etā	etan	etan	etān ebē	etan

Present Verbs

verb	Standard	Haddunmati	Huvadu
drink	bo -nī	bo -nu	bo-nnu
eat	ka -nī	ka - nu	ka - nnu
look	bala - nī	bala -nu	bala - nnu
run	duva - nī	dovā - nu	dova - nnu
write	liya -nī	liya -nu	leya -nnu
put	dama -nī	dama -nu	dama - nnu

Future Verbs

verb	Standard	Haddunmati	Huvadu	Addu	Fua Mulaku
drink	bōne	bonuun	bonnei	bōhe	bonnen
eat	kāne	kanun	kannei	kāhe	kannen
look	balāne	balānun	balannei	balāhe	balannen
run	duvāne	duvānu	dovannei	duvāhe	duvannen
write	liyāne	liyānu	leyannei	lēnehe	leyanne
put	damāne	damān	damannei	damāhe	damannen

Interrogatives

Interrog	Standard	Haddunmati	Huvadu	Addu	Fua Mulaku
who	kāku	kāku(m) kāku -he (f)	keyah	kēya kanka	keye
what	kōce kon -ecce	kōccehe	keyenteke	konta	kōnteke
why	kīvve	kiyevvegen	kehenakunvu ekenke	kiyemue	kumavve kihinvve
where	kobā	koban kobā -eh	kovai	kontāki kontāka	kobā kontaneki
when	kon- iraku	kon- irakun- hī	kon - hidaku	kon- kalaki	kon- kalaki
how	kihine	kan-henen- he	kehenakun	kehenaka	kihina
how many	kita	kitak kitei	keteke	kitaka	kitek

As seen from the above table the dialects show many differences in their vocabularies. In many cases different etyma is used for the same concept. But there are also divergences concerning whole systems. A very good example are the personal pronouns:

Pronouns

pronoun	Standard	Haddunmati	Huvadu	Addu	Fua Mulaku
I	aharen / ma aluga^{n}du	ma	ai	ava/ma	ava/ma
We	ahara - men aluga^{n}du - men	aharu –me	ahannā-ne	afiri	afū/afun
You(sg)	kalē	i^{m}ba	ta/to	ta/tō	tā/tō
You(pl)	kalē-men	i^{m}beh	tehelāne(m) tehēme(f)	teverin tafirin	tā-men ti – mīhū
He	ēna	esora	ede/eya	eye	Evu
She	ēna	emīha	eye	eye	Eya
They	emīhun	emīhun ebaemīhun	ehelāne(m) ehene(f)	everin	eōmen(m) eyā - men(f)

In phonological development the interdialectal differences are less significant. As a rule the vowel system of the standard language is more conservative than the southern dialects while in the consonant system the southern dialect show some archaic features which the northern dialects and the standard language seems to have lost.[52] For example, the southern dialects seem to have preserved the phonematic difference between /n/ and /n/ while the standard language and northern dialects have not preserved this difference. Comparative syntax, however, does not show any systematic differences between the dialects.

[52] Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects, Heidelberg 2001.

According to Fritz:

> “In many respects, the dialects of Dhivehi represent different diachronical stages in the development of the language. Especially in the field of morphology, the amount of archaic features steadily increase from the north to the south. Within the three southernmost atolls, the dialect of the Addu islands which form the southern tip of the whole Maldivian archipelago is characterized by the highest degree of archaicity53. Thus, the different classes of verb conjugation and nominal inflection are best preserved there, morphological simplifications and, as a consequence increasing from atoll to atoll towards the north”.[54]

In recent years with the increase in inter-atoll transport and communication, and the spread of mass media (radio and television which are broadcast to the islands from the capital, Male’) it has been observed that the unwritten dialects of Dhivehi are getting lost in favour of an increasing competence of the standard language[55]. The standard language is used for education and administration throughout the atolls.

[53] Sonja Fritz puts forward this theory based on research into the dialects of Addū and Fua Mulaku. She is yet to do research on the dialect of Huvadū Atoll. Only then can she determine whether the dialect of Addū of Huvadū is more archaic.

[54] Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects, Heidelberg 2001.

[55]Sonja Fritz; The Dhivehi Language; A Descriptive and Historical Grammar of Maldivian and its Dialects, Heidelberg 2001.

4. DHIVEHI WRITING SYSTEMS[56]

The oldest inscription found in the Maldives to date is an inscription on a coral stone found at an archaeological site on the island of Landhoo in Noonu Atoll. This inscription is estimated to be from the 8th century. This inscription is written in a script close to the southern Grantha Script.

The oldest paleographically datable inscription found in the Maldives is a Sanskrit inscription of Vajrayana Buddhism dating back to the 9th or 10th century A. D. This inscription is written in an early form of the Nagari script.57 (The same script is also found in some parts of the *Loamaafaanu* of the 12th century A.D.

Until the late 18th century A.D., Dhivehi was written in a script which had strong similarities to South Asian scripts such as Grantha, Elu and Vatteluttu. The early form of this script is conveniently called *Eveyla Akuru*, and is used in the loamaafaanu of the 12th and 13th centuries. It is also found inscribed on some of the ancient Buddhist relics found at sites in Male'. *Eveyla Akuru* underwent many changes over the centuries and evolved into the latter form called *Dhives* (or Dhivehi) *Akuru*, meaning "island letters". In the early 18th century, a new script called *Thaana Akuru* was introduced into formal writing and eventually replaced the old *Dhives* script. The *Thaana* script is written from right to left unlike the earlier scripts and has originated partly from the numerals used in Arabic writing, and partly from an old set of local numerals.

The earliest writing in *Thaana Akuru* found so far, dates back to 1705 A. D., but it is possible that earlier documents exist. This early writing shows a strong Arabic influence in the use

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[56] The contents of this chapter is from the book 'Dhivehi Writing Sysems', National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, Male 1999. The book was researched and compiled by the Special Advosor Ms Naseema Muhammad.

[57] Ragupathi, 1994

of vowel strokes and in the shape of writing individual letters. It can be seen that some of the characteristics of the Arabic alphabet have been modified showing that the creators of this alphabet were scholars of Arabic as well as Dhivehi. The period of the first *Thaana* documents coincided with the time when Hasan Tājuddīn (the Dhivehi historian and scholar of Arabic) lived in Male'. He was held in high esteem by the ruling Sultan, who is said to have sought his counsel on important matters. It is therefore possible that Hasan Tājuddīn may have helped in formulating the structure and writing of the new Thaana script.

This chapter is an examination of the best known scripts used in the Maldives from the 12th century until the present time. These are *Eveyla Akuru*, *Dhives Akuru* and *Thaana Akuru*.

4.1 *Thaana Akuru*

Thaana is the unique right –to –left script in which Dhivehi is written today. *Thaana Akuru* is the script that replaced *Dhives Akuru* in the late eighteenth century. The earliest existing records of *Thaana* found so far, date from 1705 A.D. According to oral tradition in the Maldives, 'the *Thaana* script was introduced to the islands by a chief and his companions who came from North, indicating that it was the national hero Muhammad Thakurufānu who introduced this script in the 16th century A.D. But there is no factual evidence supporting this tradition, and on examination of the existing early documents, it is more likely that *Thaana* was developed late in the 17th century.

The *Thaana* script represents a radical change in the form of the letters and the system of Dhivehi writing. This script did not evolve from *Dhives* or *Eveyla Akuru*, but was developed from other sources to fit the needs of the Dhivehi language. It is written from right to left unlike the earlier scripts, showing the Arabic and Persian influence of the post-Islamic era.

The origin of the name *Thaana* is unclear. Since many Dhivehi words have their origins in old Sanskrit and a few in old Indonesian as well as some other languages, Maldivian historian Muhammad Ibrāhīm Lutfī, Special Advisor to the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, Male', agrees that one of the following derivations might be possible.

Tāna (Sanskrit), meaning 'offspring' or 'posterity'.
Tānah (Indonesian), meaning 'land' or 'country'.
Tan (Maldivian), meaning 'place'.

The *Thaana* alphabet consists of twenty-four letters, to which eleven letters that represent Arabic phonemes were later added. The first nine letters of the *Thaana* alphabet were derived from the first nine Arabic numerals. The next nine letters were derived from a set of old Dhivehi numerals.58 The last six letters of the alphabet are adaptations of existing letters to accommodate the remaining sounds. The *Thaana* alphabet is given in the table below:

[58] Salahuddīn, 1928

(TÁNA ALPHABET)

No	Arabic numeral	Letter	Transliteration	Modern Name
1	١	ހ	h	hā
2	٢	ށ	ś	śaviyani
3	٣	ނ	n	nūnu
4	٤	ރ	r	rā
5	٥	ބ	b	bā
6	٦	ޅ	ḷ	ḷaviyani
7	٧	ކ	k	kāfu
8	٨	އ	a	alifu
9	٩	ވ	v	vāvu
10	[illegible]	މ	m	meemu
11	[illegible]	ފ	f	fāfu
12	[illegible]	ދ	d	dālu
13	[illegible]	ތ	t	tā
14	[illegible]	ލ	l	lāmu
15	[illegible]	ގ	g	gāfu
16	[illegible]	ޏ	ñ	ñaviyani
17	[illegible]	ސ	s	seenu
18	[illegible]	ޑ	ḍ	ḍaviyani
19		ޒ	z	zaviyani
20		ޓ	ṭ	ṭaviyani
21		ޔ	y	yā
22		ޕ	p	paviyani
23		ޖ	j	javiyani
24		ޗ	c	chaviyani

Individual letters in *Thaana* are called *viyani*, but in modern usage, where the pronunciation of the letter is the same as that of the corresponding letter in Arabic, the *viyani* in the name of the letter has been dropped and the name of the corresponding Arabic letter adopted.

e.g. *aviyani* → *alifu*

baviyani → *ba*

naviyani → *nunu*

In 1957, an additional set of letters was created for phonologically correct transliteration of Arabic loan words. This was done by adding dots to existing Thaana characters. These letters are called *Tikijehi Thaana*, meaning ‘dotted *Thaana*’[59].

Tikijehi Thaana

Thaana	K	H	W	M	B	X	g	Q
Arabic	Ω	T	ν	η	ϕ	N	ρ	ξ
Transcribed	h,x	h	‘	d	s	t	g	q
Thaana	C	J	G	V	R	Y	t	z
Arabic	δ	Ψ	ρ	∞	Z	ι	φ	–
Transcribed	s	d	G	w	r	t	z	z

[59] Paper 16-13-57, Ministry of Education, Malē, Maldives

The symbol R was added to the Thaana alphabet at a later date to express the phonological value *zh*, e.g. television, treasure. This symbol was introduced mainly to facilitate writing of loan words from English.

In *Thaana*, the consonant symbols do not carry the inherent a vowel sound as in the older scripts. The vowels are shown by diacritic strokes called *fili* placed above or below the letter. These vowel strokes of *Thaana* are shown in the table below.

***Fili* or vowel strokes**	**Transliteration**	**Name**

Diphthongs in *Thaana* are written with the change of quality in the sound shown by W (*alifu*) written as an independent vowel as the second member. These are shown in the table below:

Diphthong	Transliteration
އައި*	ai
އައު	au
އެއި	ei
އޮއި	oi
އުއި	ui
އެއު	eu

The W (*alifu*) in Thaana is included among the consonants, but has no sound in itself. It is used as a consonant when marked with a *fili*. It is also used, as shown earlier, as the second member in a diphthong to express the change in the sound quality.

In the Thaana alphabet *sukun* is shown by the symbol *o* placed above a letter. This sign indicates a syllabic consonant showing a glottal stop, doubling of a letter, a *y*-off-glide, a nasal, or the vowel-less s sibilant, depending on the consonant above which it is placed. There are five special letters on which the *sukun* is used. These are:-

﷽ ﷽	*alifu sukun*
﷽ ﷽	*sīnu sukun*
﷽ ﷽	*nūnu sukun*
﷽ ﷽	*tā sukun*
﷽ ﷽	*šaviyani sukun*

Thaana is a system of writing which was developed to meet the needs of the Dhivehi language. It has changed considerably from its early style. The rules of writing have been modified to meet the present day demands and although the influence of Arabic and Persian can be seen clearly, vestiges of the early *Dives Akuru* system can still be found in its basic rules.

In 1977, the Dhivehi script was officially changed to the Roman script. This script was called the *Latin Akuru*. All government and official documents had to be written in this script and it was taught in schools. This change was brought about mainly to enable Dhivehi typing using the Roman-letter keyboard. This change, however, lasted for only a short period of time as the official script used for writing Dhivehi was again changed to *Thaana* in 1978. *Thaana* typewriter was introduced in 1987. The Roman script is still sometimes used to write Dhivehi even today for convenience. Today it is frequently used in electronic communication such as e-mail and SMS messages and in computer databases.

The following table gives the alphabet of the *Latin Akuru*:

"Latin" Akuru

Th	th	T	H	h	h
L	l	L	Sh	sh	S
C	g	G	N	n	n
Gn	gn	N	R	r	r
S	s	S	B	b	b
D	d	D	Lh	lh	L
Z	z	Z	K	k	k
T	t	T			w
Y	y	Y	V	v	v
P	p	P	M	m	m
J	j	J	F	f	f
Ch	ch	C	Dh	dh	d

4.2 *Eveyla Akuru*

Eveyla Akuru was the system of writing used in the Maldives in the 12th century A.D. and possibly some centuries earlier. Early *Eveyla Akuru* writing has been found on madrepore stelae, tentatively dated to circa 9th –10th century A.D. The later *Eveyla Akuru* is found in the *Loamaafaanu* of the later 12th century (i.e. 1195/1196). These later scripts have been deciphered and their transliteration gives us a guide to ancient Dhivehi writing and language.

All ancient scripts were called *Dhives Akuru* or Dhivehi Akuru, literally meaning ‘scripts of island people’, by Maldivians. When H.C.P. Bell visited the Maldives in 1922, he called this particular script *Eveyla Akuru* to distinguish it from its later variant called Dhives Akuru.[60] *Eveyla* means ‘ancient’ in the Dhivehi language (*e* means ‘that’ and *veyla* means the time or period. Thus together *eveyla* means ‘that time’ or ‘ancient time’). *Eveyla Akuru*, therefore simply means ‘ancient letters’ and the name has remained until the present time.

The *Eveyla* script in this chapter dates back to 1195/1196 A.D., and is taken from Loamaafaanu of the 12th century, as well as from the work done by the later Maldivian scholar ‘Alī Najīb. The script in general bears a strong resemblance to the old Grantha, Vatteluttu and Sinhala Elu scripts and the present day Malayalam script. This leads to the conjecture that the old *Eveyla* script could have come from the southern scripts of the Indian subcontinent.

Many writers have spoken of the close resemblance of this script to the Sinhala Elu script of the 10th to 12th century A.D. According to M.W. Sugathapala de Silva, Wilhelm Geiger (who studied the *Eveyla Akuru*) said that the affinity was:

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60 Bell, 1922.

> “not so much with Medieval Sinhalese as to the Tulu of the Malabar District of Southern India, which lie opposite the Laccadive and the Maldive Islands, or doubtless even more nearer to an older Grantha type of Tulu-Malayalam, or Arya Eluttu.”

The system of writing in *Eveyla Akuru* is syllabic in structure. Letters are written from left to right, spacing of words is not observed and the writing is broken off at the end of a line. As a result, the line may end or begin in the middle of a word.

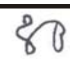
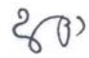
The letters represent two categories of sound, vowels and consonants. In the initial position vowels are represented in general by separate letters. Non initially, they are shown by vowel strokes or *fili*. A *fili* may occur in front of, after, above or below a consonant. When a consonant is written separately, without a *fili* and unattached to another letter, it symbolizes the consonant sound with the inherent vowel sound *a*.

For example:

ka *ga* *ma*

The vowel symbols used in *Eveyla Akuru* are listed with their corresponding phonological values in the table below. These symbols were generally used in the initial position of words, *fili* (vowel strokes) were used in non initial positions.

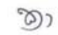
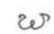
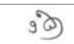
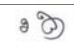
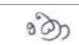
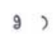
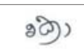
VOWEL SYMBOLS

Symbol	Sound
	a
	a
	ā
	ā
	i
	i
	u
	e or ē
	o or ō

The following *fili* or vowel strokes are used to represent vowel sound.[61]

[61] Najīb and Shafīq, 1993

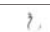
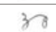
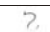
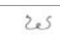
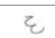
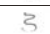
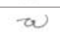
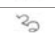
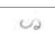
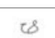
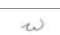
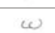
FILI (VOWEL STROKES)

Fili	Sound	Example	Transliteration
	ā		kā
	i		ki
	ī		kī
	u		ku
	u		du
	ū		kū
	e		ke
	ē		kē
	ē		kē
	o		ko
	ō		kō

The consonant symbols in *Eveyla Akuru* along with their phonological values are listed below.[62]

[62] Maniku and Wijewardene 1986, Najīb, Shafīq 1993.

CONSONANT SYMBOLS

Letter	Sound
	h
	ś or ṭ
	n
	ṇ
	r
	b
	ḷ
	k
	kh (aspirate)
	a
	a
	v
	m
	f, p
	d
	d
	d
	t
	l
	g
	s
	sh or s'
	sh or s'
	sh
	dh (aspirate)
	ṭ or ṭṭ
	y

In the transliteration and translation work done by the Maldivian scholars, the later Alī Najīb and Ahmed Shafīq, the letter was given the phonological value *š* and the letter the value *t*.

In the transliteration and the translation of the *Isdhoo* and *Dhambidhoo*[63] Loamaafaanu by Maldivian scholar Hasan Ahmed Manik and the Sri Lankan Professors Wijewardana and Disanayeke, the letter was given the phonological value of and was transliterated as *tt*.

The phonological value *š* in Dhivehi is said by linguists to have evolved from the of earlier times.[64] In modern Dhivehi the words incorporating the symbol in the copperplate writings of the 12th century are used with the phonological value *š* and not with the value *t* . The team of scholars who deciphered the *Isdhoo Loamaafaanu* in 1986 concluded that there were the following aspirate letters in the document.

After the conversation of the Maldives to Islam, it became clear that *Eveyla Akuru* had shortcomings when Arabic words had to be written in official documentation. This probably led to the formation of new symbols and modifications in the writing system, which eventually led to the gradual evolution of its successor *Dives Akuru*.

63 Da^{m}bidū : I have used the traditional Maldivian transliteration

64 Cain 1996

4.3 *Dives Akuru*

The ancient *Eveyla Akuru* found in the 12th century *Loamaafaanu* and on the coral-stone relics, evolved into the more advanced *Dhives Akuru* over a period of about two hundred years.

A *Loamaafaanu* of 1357 AD, called the *Bodugalu Miskit Loamaafaanu*" written in the sixteenth year of Sultānā Rehendi Khadheeja's[65] reign, is the earliest example of this script. This *Loamaafaanu* show distinct changes from the characters seen in the earlier *Loamaafaanu*, indicating the beginning of the *Eveyla* script's evolution into the later style called *Dhives Akuru*.

The best example of *Dhives Akuru* can be seen in the inscriptions in the beautiful *Hukuru Miskit* (Friday Mosque) in Male' on tombstones, and in some finely written official land grants inscribed on parchment. This script was extensively used for official documentation until the beginning of the 18th century. From 1705 A.D. onwards, official documents were written in *Thaana* and *Dhives Akuru*, but after 1780 A.D. the *Dhives Akuru* script fell into disuse, and its place was taken by the *Thaana* script.

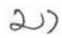
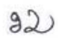
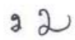
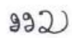
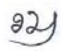
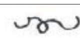
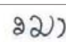
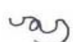
Some features of *Eveyla Akuru* have been retained in the Dives script. As in the earlier *Eveyla Akuru*, *Dhives Akuru* also represents two categories of sound, vowels and consonants. It is also written from left to right and consonant characters standing on their own have the inherent *a* sound. However, many modifications have been made to the shape of letters and new symbols have been incorporated into the alphabet, to represent new sounds. These are the symbols for *z*, *j*, and *c*. In *Dhives Akuru p* is represented by and *f* is

[65] Xadījā; I have used the traditional Maldivian transliteration.

shown by the same letter, but without the dot below. A new symbol was also formed to express the palatal *n*.

Vowel symbols and diacritics on consonants are used to represent vowels and new symbols have been formed to represent doubling and joining of consonants.

The Vowel Symbols of *Dhives Akuru:*

Vowel	Sound
	a
	ā
	i
	i
	ī
	u
	ū
	e
	e
	ē
	ē
	o
	o
	ō
	ō

FILI (VOWEL STROKES)



Fili	Sound	Example	Transliteration
	ā		kā
	i		ki
	ī		kī
	u		ku
	u		ku
	u		fu, pu
	u		ru
	ū		fū, pū
	e		ke
	ē		kē
	ai		kai
	o		ko
	ō		kō

The consonant symbols of *Dhives Akuru*, along with their phonological values are listed in the table below. Here the existing consonant symbols from *Eveyla Akuru* have been modified and new symbols to represent sound values for *z*, *j*, and c have been introduced. Also, the symbol which stood for both *p* and *f* sounds, was given to *f* and the same symbol with a dot added below was given to the value *p*. A new symbol for the palatal *n* was also introduced.

CONSONANT SYMBOLS

Letter	Sound
	h
	ś
	n
	n
	r
	r
	b
	b
	ḷ
	k
	k
	k

From the beginning of the 18th century, until about 1870 A.D., *Dhives Akuru* and *Thaana Akuru* were used together for official documentation. But at the end of this period, *Dhives Akuru* was replaced by *Thaana*.

5. THE DHIVEHI LANGUAGE TODAY AND TOMORROW

The Dhivehi language is a unique language with an abundance of dialectical variation and a rich tradition of oral folklore. Jakob Grimm's famous sentence "our language is also our history" holds true for the Dhivehi language as it is possibly the only basis for investigation into the prehistory of the Maldives and the Dhivehi people. Dhivehi language is also the key to the traditional way of life of the Maldivian people which is changing fast in the face of modernization. It might very soon be the only link that Maldivians have to their past.

Today, Dhivehi language can be said to be undergoing a process of standardisation. Many of the spoken dialects of Dhivehi are slowly getting mixed with the standard language and are slowly dying out. The educational level of Maldivians is increasing therefore more is being written in Dhivehi and more books are being produced in Dhivehi than ever before. Standards are being set for the written language. On the one hand Dhivehi language is being recorded for posterity in writing, while on the other hand rich oral traditions of Dhivehi and the rich diversity of the spoken dialects are being lost.

The very rapid pace of modernization that the Maldives has been experiencing over the last few decades has meant that Maldivians have had to adapt from a traditional, subsistence way of life to a modern, urban way of life within a very short period of time. The Dhivehi language also had to face the challenge of adapting to this new way of life. There is a need for new words in Dhivehi to express new ideas and concepts imported into the Maldivian society mainly from the western world.

Today, the knowledge of the English language is widespread in the Maldives. Education is in English medium and English is widely used in all areas especially in the private sector. There is immense socio-economic pressure for Maldivians to

learn English and to teach their children English, sometimes at the expense of their own mother tongue (Dhivehi). In the Maldivian society of today, a sound knowledge of English is necessary to obtain higher education abroad. The scope for higher education in the Maldives is limited (the Maldives College for Higher Education was established only very recently) so Maldivians have to go abroad for higher education. Hence, a good knowledge of a language other than Dhivehi is absolutely essential for study abroad.

Under such immense socio-economic pressure some Maldivian parents are speaking to their children in English even before they learn their own language. This is because these parents feel that it is more important to teach their children English than Dhivehi as it will broaden their opportunities for studying abroad and it also means better job prospects. They may also feel that Dhivehi language is old-fashioned and archaic and of not much use in this modern world. However, most Maldivians are aware that the Dhivehi language is a symbol of their identity and that even though Dhivehi has dialectal differences it is still a strong unifying force for Maldivians.

Today, many linguists are concerned with the 'endangered languages' and the 'death' of minority languages in the face of globalization. Organizations such as UNESCO have also recently tried to bring the world's attention to the issues of the 'death' of minority languages in face of globalization. Hence, from the year 2000, UNESCO proclaimed 21st February as "International Mother Language Day". According to research by linguistics, of the 6800 that exists today more than half would die before the end of this century. Some linguists say that only about six or seven major languages would survive while the rest die out.

Today the Dhivehi language too can be classified as a 'potentially endangered' language because it is "socially and

economically disadvantaged, under heavy pressure from a larger language (namely English), and beginning to lose child speakers".[66] According to David Crystal there are three broad stages that a language goes through when it is dying. These stages can be said to be the stages that Dhivehi is going through today. The first is immense socio-economic pressure for the people to speak a dominant language. In the case of Dhivehi speakers today, they are facing immense pressure to speak English (as discussed earlier). The second stage is "a stage of emerging bilingualism as people become increasingly efficient in the new language while still retaining competence in their old one". Dhivehi language has been going through this stage since the 1980s and 1990s because since this time more and more Maldivians are becoming proficient in English while still being competent in Dhivehi.

Today, Dhivehi can be said to be entering the third stage "in which the younger generation are becoming increasingly proficient in the new language, identifying more and more with it, and finding their first language less relevant to their new needs".[67] Today, many of the younger generation of Maldivians are identifying more and more with English language and finding that Dhivehi, their first language, is less relevant to their needs. However, at the same time many Maldivians are aware of the importance of Dhivehi as a crucial part of identity and their cultural heritage. According to Crystal, in this third and final stage of language death, parents begin to speak to their children in the new language and the new language is used more and more and the first language is used less and less in important political and economic areas. This can be seen in the case of Dhivehi language at present.

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[66] David Crystal; Language Death, Cambridge University Press, 2000.
[67] David Crystal; Language Death, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Today, Dhivehi language is the national language of the Maldives and it is still very much the principal means of communication all over the Maldivian archipelago. However, English is the medium of instruction at school and it is widely used in many political and economic domains. Most written communications in the private sector are in English while most written communication within the government is in Dhivehi. This is mainly because all formal communication within the government has to be in Dhivehi. Thus Maldivian society can be said to be in a state of bilingualism, both Dhivehi and English are widely used and have equally important but differing roles. The Dhivehi language is important as a means of expressing the community's identity and for preserving historical links, and for communication within the family, maintaining social relationships, and for communication in all formal situations. English is important as a means of communication with the outside world and as a medium of education and it is essential for the 'development' or 'progress' of the community (in the sense of achieving a higher standard of living).

Crystal proposes that a language can exist in a healthy state of bilingualism without the minority language or mother tongue 'dying' but this depends on the attitude of the people to their mother language. So if we are to predict the future of the Dhivehi language we can say that there is a chance that it could exist in a state of 'healthy' bilingualism with English but this depends on the attitude of Dhivehi speakers to their language, whether they take pride in their language, whether they enjoy listening to others using the language and use it themselves whenever they can and as creatively as they can. If most Dhivehi speakers take pride in their language and enjoy using it, it has a good chance of survival.

5.1 Efforts by the Government to Preserve and Promote the Dhivehi Language

Over the past twenty years the government of Maldives has also put in a lot of effort to promote the Dhivehi language.

In 1979, the Maldivian government established the Council for Dhivehi Language and Literature with the broad mandate to promote the Dhivehi language and literature and to do research into the language. The council was to function directly under the President's Office. In 1982, this council became the Language Department at the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research. Since 1982, this Department has been organizing and running various courses and holding national competitions to promote literary skills such as public speaking and creative writing in Dhivehi language. It has been writing and publishing numerous books on the Dhivehi language and literature.68 It has also been working on an official dictionary of the Dhivehi language.

Recently, the Language Department has put a lot of emphasis on raising public awareness about the importance of the Dhivehi language as a crucial part of the Maldivian national identity and the most important key to their heritage and history. It has worked hard at fostering a sense of pride in the Dhivehi language in the Maldivian youth of today through various courses, literary activities and book production. Since the year 2000, the Centre has helped mark the "International Mother Language Day" and has used this occasion to raise public awareness on issues of language and identity. The Centre has also played a very important role in the production and promotion of literary books in Dhivehi. In the past couple of years, the government has given a lot of importance to the production of children's books in the Dhivehi language as there is a serious lack of books for children in the Dhivehi.

[68] This is book is also the work of the Language Department at the National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research.

Book production in Dhivehi has increased dramatically in recent years.

Another significant stride forward for the Dhivehi language is that today it can be used in electronic technology. Private individuals have played a very important role in this. Private parties have made numerous *Thaana* fonts which are widely used in the Maldives now. In the year 2000, the official Dhivehi dictionary '*Bas fot*' came out in electronic (Compact Disc) format for the first time. The use of Dhivehi in electronic technology can be seen as a positive sign as electronic technology can help in preserving and promoting the Dhivehi language.

Therefore, even if the Dhivehi language can be classified as a "potentially endangered" language it can also be said to be a "viable but small" language because it is spoken by a relatively isolated small community with a strong internal organization where the speakers are aware of the way that their language is a marker of identity[69] and efforts are being made both in the public and the private sector to ensue its survival. This means that there is a good chance for the survival of the Dhivehi language. However, in the end the Maldivian people's attitude towards their mother language will determine its survival in the future. It would indeed be a great loss for humanity (not just for Maldivians) to lose a unique language such as Dhivehi with its rich oral traditions and dialects.

[69] David Crystal; Language Death, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

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